



Introduction

Currently, Boston generates over 572 million pounds of trash annually. Only 13.5% of this trash is currently recycled while the rest is sent to landfills and incinerators. The environmental and public health effects of this burn and bury approach are well known.

Since 1990, Boston Recycling has seen gradual increases. This slow progress, however, shows much more work needs to be done to reach the levels of recycling possible in Boston and to make the program competitive with those of many other municipalities. The Boston Neighborhood Recycling Coalition is asking the City to adopt a goal of doubling the recycling rate in three years and tripling it within five. A 40% recycling rate will mean less trash going to polluting landfills and incinerators, cleaner streets, preserved natural resources, and saved taxpayer dollars for Boston residents.

The City Recycling staff has made some strides to improve the program. Since recycling drop-off centers were first set up in Boston in 1988 there have been a three key advances in Boston Recycling; the City has gradually expanded the program to collect many materials, City staff have launched creative programs to generate more participation, and the Recycling staff are working to develop a five year strategic plan for the Boston Recycling Program.

However, shortfalls in the program remain:

- Participation in the blue bin program is low due to lack of education
- 20% of Boston residents don't have easy access to recycling programs because they live in large apartment buildings
- Due to few pick-up days and little publicity, the Yard Waste Collection captures only a small fraction of yard debris generated, sending many easily composted materials to the landfill.

To reach the BNRC's goals, Boston needs to double the amount of materials collected through the curbside blue bin program, collect eight times more yard waste, and over time, implement new programs to capture bulky waste like furniture.

The Boston Neighborhood Recycling Coalition (BNRC) has studied the Boston recycling program and developed recommendations for improvement. The following brief report details the current status of Boston recycling and highlights the steps necessary to reach 40% recycling in five years.

The BNRC links residents, block captains, neighborhood groups, and non-profit organizations together to implement effective strategies to reduce waste and increase recycling. The BNRC works with the city of Boston to improve recycling education and access with a goal of doubling Boston's recycling rate within three years and tripling it within five years.

Boston Recycling Today

State and Local Policies

In 1990, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) set a statewide recycling

goal of 46% by the year 2000. From 1990 through 1999, the state passed bans on lead-acid batteries, leaves and other yard debris, white goods, all metal and glass containers, #1 and #2 single polymer plastics, recyclable paper, and cathode-ray tubes from disposal in all state landfills and incinerators. Currently, waste disposal facilities, including trash transfer stations, must inspect loads periodically.

A container deposit law, the Bottle Bill, went into effect in January 1983. The law requires consumers to pay a \$.05 deposit on all "containers of soda, carbonated soft drinks, beer and other malt beverages." These deposits can be redeemed at locations where the product is sold or at redemption centers. All unclaimed deposits become state property and go into the Clean Environment Fund, totaling over \$20 million last year. A portion of this money then funds recycling activities in the Commonwealth through municipal grants, equipment, market development efforts, and educational outreach.

A Boston Recycling Ordinance was passed in July 1990 setting recycling goals of 28% by 1993, 38 percent by 1996, and 50 percent by 1999 provided there is a Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) to market the collected materials. The ordinance does not require the City to "increase it's net cost incurred for solid waste management," although it does note the City might choose to do so if an "investment in recycling might save future tax payer dollars." The ordinance requires the Commissioner of Public Works to write an annual analysis of the recycling program, detailing rates of participation, volume and weight of waste successfully recycled, and the net cost of the City's solid waste management system. Furthermore, the ordinance requires the commissioner to "prepare proposals for increasing participation in the recycling program and shall include the analysis of the merits of user fees, mandatory participation and sanctions." In addition, this ordinance requires the City's purchasing agent to research the feasibility of buying recycled supplies and the Environment Department to propose a system by which the commercial sector can recycle office paper and other materials "where feasible."

Boston residents must place their recyclable containers in blue bins provided by the city and their recyclable paper in paper bags or bound beside the blue bin. Placement of non-recyclable material in with recyclables may result in no pick up of recycling. Blue bins are available for free by calling the City's Recycling Program or Sanitation Department.

Source Reduction Initiatives

Boston's source reduction initiatives consist of promoting home composting. Boston has worked with the state to encourage backyard composting by sponsoring discounted home composting bin sales and annual classes. Since 1994, Boston has sold 2,000 home compost bins. In 1999, Boston residents home composted an estimated 438 tons.

Recycling Program

Boston residents can recycle 25 categories of materials in the curbside and drop-off recycling programs. In 1999, 13% of residential waste was recycled through curbside recycling, special drop-off recycling, and deposit container recovery. The city contracts with Waste Management Inc. and Allied, to collect and transport materials to the KTI Recycling of New England, a Materials Recycling Facility (MRF), located in Charlestown, where materials are sorted and marketed. The facility sorts recyclables both mechanically and manually. Recyclables are then baled and sent to processors. Some of the end products of Boston recyclables include, new glass containers, plastic containers, plastic benches, metal cans,

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
Boston Public Library

<http://www.archive.org/details/bostonrecyclingr00bost>

tissue paper and napkins. Under its contract with KTI Recycling of New England, Boston currently receives revenue from recycling dependent on the value of those materials. This revenue, however, goes into the City's general fund and does not necessarily effect the funding of the Boston Recycling Program.

Yard Waste Collection Program

Boston provides yard waste pick up on 4 Saturdays in the fall and 4 Saturdays in the spring. In 1999, approximately 1,300 tons, or about 5% of the total yard waste tons and .5% of the overall waste stream, were collected for composting at the City's Public Works composting site. The mature compost is distributed to the city's 100 community gardens.

White Goods Recycling

Boston residents can currently place large appliances like refrigerators and washing machines on the curb and haulers will pick them up or make a special trip to pick them up. These appliances are diverted to a scrap processor for recycling.

Apartment Building Recycling

In 1995, the City announced it would pick up recyclables from large apartment buildings (anything over 6 units) if requested by landlord or property manager. Upon request, recycling staff will make a site visit to assess the building's recycling needs. The building management is responsible for all collection containers and education of residents. Starting in 1999, the Recycling Program stepped up efforts to induce more landlords and management companies to use the service by sending out mailings to all management companies, publishing an educational brochure on large apartment building recycling, and conducting workshops on how to use the City's recycling collection service.

Education, Publicity, and Outreach

Currently, Boston residents receive one to two mailings per year that outline how the City's program works. The guide is also published in French, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese. The Recycling Program works with Neighborhood Services to distribute these. Recycle guides are paid for by the state. Twice a year, the City distributes door hangers about yard waste collection to appropriate neighborhoods in the fall and spring. The Recycling Program publishes press releases announcing events like household hazardous waste pick up, apartment building recycling, and yard waste collection. Local papers often publish them. In addition, the program places 50 placards in neighborhoods advertising programs and paid ads in 20 papers for up to 8-10 weeks. Blue bins are distributed on request for free.

The Recycling Program also invites all teachers in Boston to participate in the state-funded program, Recycling Education Assistance for the Public Schools (REAPS). Teachers are provided with professional environmental educators to do classroom presentations on recycling and other

environmental issues for free.

Curbside Collection of Recyclables

Service Provider: Waste Management Inc. and Allied.

Start-up date: November 1994.

Mandatory: No.

Households Served: All single family and multi-family dwelling up to six units. (Serves about 228,000 households).

Materials accepted: Newspaper, magazines, catalogues, junk mail, white and colored paper, brown bags, phone books, paper back books, flattened boxboard (e.g. cereal boxes), flattened corrugated cardboard, (no soiled paper or pizza boxes) glass bottles and jars, tin and aluminum food and soda cans, aluminum foil, pie plates, jar lids and empty aerosol cans, all plastic containers (no motor oil or chemical containers) and milk and juice containers or drink boxes (no plastic bags).

Collection Frequency: Weekly, same day as first trash day, or in the case where there are three trash days, the middle trash day.

Set-Out Method: Corrugated cardboard must be flattened to 3'x3' or less and placed under the blue bin. All recyclable containers should be placed in blue bins or plastic box clearly marked "recyclables." All paper recyclables should be placed in a paper bag or bound and placed next to the blue bin.

Collection Method: One or two-person crew use split compactor trucks with one compartment for mixed recyclables, the other for paper.

Participation rate: NA.

Participation Incentives: None.

Enforcement: Collection crew will leave blue bins at the curb if materials within are totally inappropriate.

Curbside Collection of Yard Waste

Start-up Date: October 1994. Mature compost from yard waste collection is distributed to 100 community gardens across the city.

Service Provider: Waste Management and Allied.

Households Served: All in single family and multi-family dwellings of up to six units in "leavey neighborhoods," mainly, West Roxbury, Roslindale, Hyde Park, Jamaica Plain, South Dorchester, Mattapan, and parts of Brighton.

Mandatory: No.

Materials Collected: Leaves, weeds, grass, hedge, trimmings, and brush.

Collection Frequency: Fall collection on 4 Saturdays in late October and November and Spring collection on 4 Saturdays in May.

Set-out Method: Yard waste must be set out in paper lawn bags or open trash barrels. No plastic trash bags should be used.

Collection Methods: One or two-person crew use compactor trucks.

Participation Rate: NA

Participation Incentives: None.

Enforcement: None.

Costs

In 1999, the City spent an estimated \$25 million for trash, recycling, and associated programs. Of this, approximately 10% is spent on recycling and 90% is spent on trash collection and disposal. In addition, the state awarded about \$400,000 in grants for education, equipment, and as part of the Municipal

Recycling Incentive Program. Boston's contract with the haulers will come up for renewal in July 2002.

Funding

Currently the Boston Recycling Program operates on about \$400,000 from state grants to fund education and equipment. Funds for the rest of the Solid Waste Management program, staffing, and collection contract, come from the City's general funds. Any revenue the program generates is put in the City's general fund and does not necessarily go back to fund the recycling program.

Recycling Advances in Boston

While there is still a lot of work to do to realize the full potential of the Boston Recycling Program, the City Recycling staff has made some strides to improve the program. Since recycling drop-off centers were first set up in Boston in 1988 there have been a three key advances in Boston Recycling; the City has gradually expanded the program to collect many materials, City staff have launched creative programs to generate more participation, and the Recycling staff are working to develop a five year strategic plan for the Boston Recycling Program.

- Since 1990, program staff started to implement the curbside recycling program and have been gradually expanding Boston resident recycling options by expanding the list of materials collected at the curb, implemented curbside yard waste pick-up, household hazardous waste day drop-offs, permanent paint and motor oil drop-offs, and home composting. As a result, for the dedicated recycler, the Boston Recycling Program does offer recycling options for a fairly comprehensive list of materials. Boston Permanent Paint and Motor Oil Drop-Off Centers have recently won an award from the State.
- The Boston Recycling Program staff have made efforts to push the scope of the program further with a 3 month participation campaign in East Boston in 1997, by offering electronics recycling in partnership with Good Will Industries and Salvation Army in 1999, and through participation in the DEP's Municipal Recycling Incentive Program, stepping up outreach to large apartment building property managers to implement recycling programs.
- Furthermore, the Boston Recycling Program Director, Susan Cascino, launched a five-year strategic planning process in the fall of 1999. Community groups, the Boston Neighborhood Recycling Coalition, haulers, city administration staff, and recyclers were interviewed. Recycling staff held a public forum on January 13, 2000 to solicit suggestions on how to improve the recycling program. The BNRC sees this plan as an excellent opportunity for the Mayor to become a champion of the recycling program. The plan has not yet been released.

Drop-Off Collection

Number of Sites: 1 site, Boston Public Works drop-off in Mission Hill, open every Saturday from 9 am-3pm.

Staffing: None, except spot checks

Service Provider: City of Boston Public Works Department in conjunction with the Boston Building Materials Co-op.

Materials accepted: Containers, papers, cardboard, and reusable building materials.

Participation Incentives: None.

Sectors Served: All Boston Residents.

Surplus Paint Products and Motor Oil Recycling Drop-Off

Sites an hours: Open one Saturday a month from 9am to 1pm from April to November: the first Saturday of each month at the Roxbury Public Works Yard, 280 Highland St, on the second Saturday of each month at the Hyde Park Public Works Yard, 58 Dana Ave, on the third Saturday of each month at the Brighton Public Works Yard, 315 Western Ave, on the fourth Saturday of each month at the East Boston Public Works Department Yard at 320 East Eagle St.

Service: Residents may come to Boston's Paint Swap Shops to obtain free paint.

Start-Up Date: 1996

Staffing: District Yard staff and spot checks by Recycling Program Staff.

Service Provider: Public Works Department

Materials accepted: Latex paint, oil paint, stains/varnish, paint thinner, and motor oil (no mixed paints and all items must be in their original containers and tightly sealed).

Participation Incentives: None.

Sectors Served: All Boston residents, no businesses.

Household Hazardous Waste Drop-Offs Days

Number of sites: 1 day long collection in spring and fall at UMASS campus in Dorchester.

Start-up Date: 1994 (Once a year in previous years)

Staffing: Public Works Department Staff and contractor

Materials accepted: All household products, which are toxic, corrosive, flammable, and poisonous. More details?

Participation Incentives: None.

Sectors Served: All Boston residents, no businesses.

Electronics Recycling

Service: Drop-off at Goodwill Industries at 1010 Harrison Ave, or call Salvation Army for pick-up.

Service Provider: State funded and Good-will Industries, Salvation Army.

Materials collected: TVs and computers including keyboard and screen.

Participation: None.

Participation Incentives: None.

Sectors Served: All Boston residents, no businesses.

Recommendations for Improvement

While there has been progress in increasing recycling in the last ten years, there is a lot more work to be done to make Boston's Recycling Program competitive with the program of other Commonwealth municipalities. Many improvements are easily implemented and can be accomplished in the short-term, while others are more complicated and will require a longer timeline and more planning. The Boston Neighborhood Recycling Coalition (BNRC) has studied the Boston recycling program and developed recommendations for improvement. The BNRC formed to link residents, block captains, neighborhood groups, and non-profit organizations together to implement effective strategies to reduce waste and increase recycling. The BNRC works with the city of Boston to improve recycling education and access with a goal of doubling Boston's recycling rate within three years and tripling it within five years.

In order for the city to reach its full recycling potential, aggressive changes need to be made to put the program on par with the best recycling programs in the state. The City should live up to the spirit of its

1990 ordinance and adopt the goals of doubling recycling in three years and tripling it within five. In particular, more resources need to be invested in the recycling program and Mayor Menino should prioritize recycling and publicly champion the program.

To reach these goals, the City will need to double the amount of recycling in the "blue box" curbside program, expand the yard waste collection to collect eight times as much, and implement new programs to capture bulky items like furniture. The BNRC has developed six main categories of improvement to achieve these goals:

- **Increase Participation**

While the Boston curbside recycling program collects a comprehensive list of materials, many residents do not know how to get a blue bin or how to use the program and as a result, do not recycle at all or as much as they can. Many recyclers are not aware of recycling guidelines. For example, some people place paper in with containers in blue bins, sometimes leading to the disposal, rather than recycling, of those materials. Program visibility needs to be increased to regularly reach all Boston residents, including a consistent public awareness campaign, reviving the Citywide Block Captain Program, improving the web page, and providing and promoting recycling in all public areas. Furthermore, the city should negotiate the next hauler contract to include incentives to collect more recycling and educate residents. To further increase the recycling program visibility, the City should provide and promote recycling in all public areas.

- **Expand Access to Recycling to all Boston Residents**

Though the city provides free recycling collection to large apartment buildings if they request it, over 60% of all apartment buildings do not provide convenient recycling to their tenants. As a result, over 20% of Boston residents cannot recycle easily. Furthermore, many institutions and businesses do not offer recycling. All Boston residents need access to convenient recycling either through more aggressive outreach to establish recycling collection in all buildings and/or by implementing mandatory recycling in all buildings. The building code for new buildings or major renovations should be changed to require space for recycling collection. In addition, all City institutions including fire stations, hospitals, schools, public housing, city agencies, and police stations should have visible recycling programs. The city should research the feasibility of implementing mandatory recycling in all institutions and businesses.

- **Invest More Resources in the Recycling Program**

Comparable cities with strong recycling rates spend more than twice what Boston spends on recycling. To invest in recycling, and save taxpayer dollars down the road, Boston needs to invest an estimated \$500,000 - \$700,000 annually. Once recycling reaches higher levels, the City will realize savings from avoided costs of disposal.

- **Expand Existing Programs like Yard Waste Pick-Up and HHW Drop-Off**

While the city offers opportunities for composting yard waste and recycling household hazardous waste, TVs, computers, household paint, and motor oil, many residents do not know the programs exist or find access to them difficult. The Yard Waste Collection should be expanded to more frequent collection days throughout the year that are better publicized. In addition, the city should conduct more visibility and outreach to maximize participation in all programs. Household hazardous waste drop-off days should be expanded to 4 times a year at different locations.

- **Increase Citizen Involvement in Program Planning and Implementation**

For the Recycling Program to succeed, staff must solicit feedback from neighborhood residents to accurately measure the success of new programs and educational outreach. Staff should work with community groups to set up forums in neighborhoods where residents can ask questions and make suggestions. In addition, the Recycling Program should set up a committee of concerned Boston residents to help guide the program. Finally, information about the program's successes and failures should be made public for analysis by independent groups.

- **Increase Waste Reduction**

A complete recycling program must include an aggressive program to avoid the creation of trash. In Boston, we generate over 572 million pounds of trash a year. Much of this trash can be avoided or reused. We need to work to reduce Boston's trash by setting waste reduction goals, setting up collection systems for clothes, furniture, and appliances, construction debris from residential properties, and conducting a public awareness campaign targeting waste reduction.

The Case for 40% + Recycling in Boston

A strong recycling program in Boston would bring many invaluable benefits to the City including environment and public health benefits, saved taxpayer dollars, sustainable jobs, and a model program from which other cities can learn.

Boston is the largest municipal trash generator in New England, churning out over 500 million pounds of residential trash each year. Currently, the majority, 87%, of this trash ends up buried in landfills or burnt in incinerators. The environmental and public health impact of this burn and bury approach is well known: landfills can contaminate groundwater and incinerators are the state's largest producer of dioxin and mercury, chemicals that can cause cancer and neurological damage. Since 1995, Massachusetts has had a moratorium on any new landfills or incinerators. With state officials currently debating whether to build more landfills or incinerators, Boston should assume the environmental responsibility of aggressively reducing its reliance on disposal.

In addition to reducing the need for more polluting landfills and incinerators, recycling reduces greenhouse gases, saves critical natural resources, preserves energy, and creates jobs. Reusing valuable materials reduces the need for mining and logging of virgin resources. Furthermore, recycling has

brought \$600 million dollars to the Massachusetts economy annually and has created over 12,000 jobs.

In most cases, cities with strong recycling rates pay less for recycling than they do for trash disposal. As a result, as recycling increases, fewer and fewer taxpayer dollars are spent on expensive disposal. In the Northeast, disposal currently cost on average about 55-80\$ per ton. As Boston's recycling rate increases, the City will realize savings from avoided trash disposal costs.

The City of Boston has been nationally recognized for its community policing programs and for its Main Streets programs, winning praise from many including President Clinton. In addition, the City is an international tourist attraction and draws some of the most highly qualified students from around the world. The Recycling Program should be visible and successful in order to send the message that Boston cares about the environment and its community. Furthermore, Boston residents deserve a world-class environmental service. The recycling program provided by the City of Boston should rival the best programs in the world. Dozens of Commonwealth municipalities have programs reaching 50% recycling or over. In addition, cities like Worcester, Minneapolis, Seattle, and Austin also have reached strong recycling rates. While significantly increasing recycling in Boston is a unique venture with its own challenges, the City can expand the service necessary to add the Recycling Program to the list of the City's achievements.

Agenda for Action

While the City has made gradual improvements in the scope and success of the recycling program since its inception in 1990, now is the time for Mayor Menino to revitalize the Recycling Program and lend it the necessary resources and energy to make it a model program. There are three factors that make recommitting to the program now, essential.

- The 5-year Strategic Plan that the Recycling Program staff has undertaken, a comprehensive look at the recycling program and methods to improve it, is a perfect opportunity for the Mayor to commit more resources to recycling.
- In addition, state officials are considering right now how to manage the state's trash for the next ten years. Having the City of Boston showing commitment to a strong recycling and waste reduction program would help reduce the need for additional landfills and incinerators.
- The contract between the City of Boston and its haulers, currently Waste Management and Allied, is up for renegotiation in 2002. This makes plans to implement program improvements very well timed, as these changes can be included in any new contract.

The Boston Neighborhood Recycling Coalition is forming now to work with the city to make a model recycling program a reality in Boston. The coalition is working with neighborhood groups throughout the city to help increase recycling and waste reduction on the neighborhood level as well as asking the City to invest more in the program.

Boston residents that are interested in getting involved should contact the BNRC at (617) 747-4407.

